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SUBJECT: FNC ELECTIONS: EXTENSIVE UAE PUBLIC EDUCATION
MEDIA CAMPAIGN

REF: A) ABU DHABI 4015, B) ABU DHABI 3904, C) ABU DHABI 3877,
D) ABU DHABI 3641, E) ABU DHABI 3463, F) ABU DHABI 3344

¶1. Summary: In an effort to engage citizens in the upcoming Federal National Council (FNC) elections, the UAE government has extensively utilized the media to spread awareness, answer queries, and encourage public interest in the process.

Local print and broadcast media have reported heavily on the progress of each emirate in its preparation for elections. The National Election Commission (NEC) publishes daily, in all local newspapers, information on election rules, and contact information for public queries. Rulers have used the press to emphasize the importance of credible elections and women's participation. (Note: One half of the 40-member FNC is to be "elected" by a limited number of appointed delegates in December, 2006. All candidates in the UAE's first experiment with elections at the federal level must come from this same chosen group of electors. The public awareness campaign is extensive in spite of the fact that the average citizen has no direct role in the vote. End note.) End summary.

¶2. For the past two months, both English and Arabic dailies have reported on meetings between the NEC and electoral committees established within individual emirates. The meetings have been held to discuss progress on election mechanisms, as well as logistics and electronic voting. The entire list of over 6,000 designated electors was published in the Arabic press (ref B), as who made the list and the number of notable citizens who were not included became the talk of the town. The NEC has prepared an almost daily page in all local Arabic newspapers dedicated to information on the electoral process, including select clauses from the Executive Election Regulations that were announced in early October and presented tastefully on full-page color ads with bold lettering. The media notices also provide campaign information, describe the role of electoral college members, and give notice of a hotline and website (www.uaenec.ae) for public inquiries. The NEC page includes NEC's campaign logo of a young UAE national boy running with the UAE flag. The page has occasionally included the photo of a UAE man and/or woman, thus carrying the message that this election process targets both genders.

¶3. On October 18, NEC launched a radio campaign via all local Arabic radio stations to educate voters about elections, and is preparing to launch a television awareness campaign. NEC also launched a communication center for voters to update their personal data and inquire about the election process. The center has received about 2000 questions in less than three weeks.

¶4. During the week of October 15, President Khalifa met with Minister of State for FNC Affairs Anwar Gargash to express his approval of election preparations; President Khalifa

underscored the necessity of honest, accurate elections. On that same day, Dubai Ruler and UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, in a meeting with prominent journalists, said that these elections constitute the first step towards direct elections, and encouraged the women electors to have the self confidence to nominate themselves for one of the FNC seats. The media gives broad coverage to pronouncements by these government figures.

15. Comment: In spite of the limited nature of participation in the December voting, the UAEG appears determined to educate the citizenry on the intent and mechanism of the selection process, presumably in preparation for broader-based elections in the future. The media is being employed to stir up something resembling a campaign atmosphere. Even skeptics of the current exercise acknowledge an official effort to deepen public awareness of democratic processes. The UAEG is also adding elements of democracy education to its school curriculum reform (ref E).
End comment.
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